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SUBJECT: PAHOR EXPECTS FINAL ACT TO BORDER DRAMA

Classified By: CDA Brad Freden, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Prime Minister Pahor's Foreign Policy Advisor Marko Makovec told CDA October 23 that Pahor took away a positive impression of this week's telephone conversation with Deputy Secretary Steinberg. Makovec expressed the PM's appreciation for Washington's understanding and support. He noted, however, that Pahor could not sustain a "keep talking" approach beyond Monday's meeting with Croatian PM Kosor due to an increasingly hostile domestic political environment. PM Pahor feels that support for the arbitration agreement is crumbling within his own coalition, according to Makovec. He explained that several ministers have privately warned Pahor not to go to Zagreb, presumably because they fear the consequences if he comes back empty-handed. Pahor plans to call a meeting with coalition members this weekend to try to ensure a united front in advance of his trip.

¶2. (C) Makovec confirmed that Pahor seeks to sign the arbitration agreement in Zagreb on October 26. When CDA asked if a public statement by the two PMs that they had resolved all their remaining differences would be sufficient, Makovec declined to answer. If the two Prime Ministers cannot reach agreement, Makovec said Pahor would publicly acknowledge that talks had failed. Slovenia would then inform EU member states at the October 29-30 European Council meeting that it would re-impose its blockade on Croatia's accession talks.

¶3. (C) Makovec noted that the political environment is now such that Pahor must make a public statement and release the text of the arbitration agreement after Monday's meeting, regardless of how it goes. CDA urged Makovec not to release the text of the agreement without Croatian PM Kosor's concurrence, as this would violate the current "gentlemen's agreement" to consult with each other before taking action publicly. He urged Makovec to find a way to meet Croatia's concern regarding "non prejudice," and noted that we were also encouraging Zagreb to find a way to say yes. CDA requested that Pahor wait at least until the European Council meeting to make any public announcement, noting that Slovenia should consult with its friends and allies before taking any irreversible steps. Makovec said in response that he would urge the PM not to make a definitive announcement before the European Council meeting. In closing, CDA reiterated the U.S.' strong opposition to the re-imposition of reservations on Croatia's EU accession talks, to which Makovec nodded grimly.

¶4. (C) Comment: Makovec's tone throughout was one of grim resignation. He clearly was not conveying an ultimatum, but rather a sense that the curtain was about to go up on the final act of a drama that may not have a happy ending. The view here seems to be that if the two Prime Ministers cannot resolve the remaining differences face-to-face, the differences are irresolvable. If Pahor does not recognize this, he is either a fool or a knave, according to his critics. The Prime Minister will face perhaps the most difficult decision of his political career if he returns from

Zagreb without an agreement: re-impose the blockade on Croatia's accession talks and face Washington's -- and to a lesser extent, Brussels' -- wrath; or concede that his government's approach for the last 10 months was ill-conceived from the beginning. The first option is probably less likely to cause him to lose his job, at least in the short term, but neither is particularly palatable to this embattled Prime Minister. Ironically, his political fate may be in Croatia's hands. End comment.
FREDEN